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Challenging Censorship through Creativity: Responses to the Ban on *Sputnik* in the GDR

Author(s): Laura Bradley

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CHALLENGING CENSORSHIP THROUGH CREATIVITY: RESPONSES TO THE BAN ON *SPUTNIK* IN THE GDR

Censorship was a fact of everyday life in the GDR, but Erich Honecker's decision to ban the Soviet magazine *Sputnik* sent shockwaves through society in November 1988; the Stasi even launched disciplinary proceedings against three of its own officers when they objected to the ban.¹ The case offers an opportunity to examine why a specific instance of censorship generated opposition, and how objections to it were articulated. Research on the ban has hitherto concentrated on objections that were expressed through officially sanctioned channels, such as petitions (*Eingaben*) lodged with the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED).² The authors of petitions tended to accept the limitations imposed by the genre: they challenged the ban specifically, rather than the system as a whole. This article shifts the focus to non-legal challenges that point to the parallel existence of an emerging culture of creative protest. It investigates expressions of dissent in the public space and two new works of art: Reiner Bredemeyer's musical intervention 'Post – modern' and an ingenious cycle of samizdat poems by Kito Lorenc. Bredemeyer and Lorenc were not aware of each other's responses to the ban on *Sputnik*,³ but there are parallels between the methods that they used to criticize both this individual act of censorship and, more broadly, media discourse in the GDR.

Shooting down 'Sputnik': Media Mismanagement

Sputnik was a colour magazine named after the first Soviet satellite sent into orbit, and it featured items from the Soviet press. It was published in several languages, including German, from 1967 to 1991, and carried articles on culture and art, history, science and technology, sport, and fashion, as well as crossword puzzles and recipes. In the late 1980s it also had regular sections on perestroika, glasnost, and democracy, and this is what increased its interest

¹ Schindler, 'Ergebnisse der Bearbeitung von Schreiben, die von Angehörigen des MfS im Zusammenhang mit der Nichtauslieferung der Zeitschrift "Sputnik" 10/88 an das ZK der SED gerichtet wurden', 19 January 1989, Archiv der Bundesbehörde für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (henceforth BStU), MfS SED-Kreisleitung 4581, fols 35–40.

² Oliver Werner assesses *Eingaben* submitted to the SED in the Leipzig region and examines how the Parteikontrollkommission responded. See Oliver Werner, 'Die "Sputnik"-Krise in der SED 1988/89', in *Revolution und Transformation in der DDR 1989/90*, ed. by Günther Heydemann and others, Schriftenreihe der Gesellschaft für Deutschlandforschung, 73 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1999), pp. 117–36. See also Martin Sabrow, 'Die Wiedergeburt des klassischen Skandals: Öffentliche Empörung in der späten DDR', in *Skandal und Diktatur: Formen öffentlicher Empörung im NS-Staat und in der DDR*, ed. by Martin Sabrow (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004), pp. 231–65.

³ Personal interview with Dr Ute Bredemeyer, 20 March 2012; letter from Kito Lorenc to Laura Bradley, 7 May 2012.

to its 130,000 subscribers in the GDR, at the same time as increasing the irritation it caused to the SED Politbüro. While Politbüro members continued to profess the GDR's loyalty to the USSR, these professions were wearing dangerously thin. In 1987, for instance, Kurt Hager controversially dismissed Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms as a 'wallpaper change', arguing that the GDR had no need to follow suit.⁴ Erich Honecker's patience with *Sputnik* ran out in October 1988, when the latest issue carried an article criticizing German Communists for not having joined forces with the Social Democrats in the Weimar Republic. The author, Julian Semjonow, argued that a left-wing alliance could have prevented Hitler from winning the Reichstag elections.⁵ This argument caused personal offence to Honecker, as he and his colleagues in the Politbüro based their claims to legitimacy on having taken a principled stand against National Socialism in the Weimar Republic and Third Reich. *Sputnik* was quietly withdrawn from circulation, prompting numerous enquiries from subscribers as to why they had not received their copies.⁶ On 19 November the withdrawal was finally announced in the SED Central Committee newspaper *Neues Deutschland*.

The ban on *Sputnik* was unprecedented in the GDR, as it was an open act of censorship against a Soviet publication. The ban was widely viewed as illegitimate, even among Party members. It amounted to a breach of the authorities' contract with the people and of the terms under which media policy had been conducted since 1945. Even though the terms of the existing contract may not have been popular, they did create expectations regarding the sorts of actions that were deemed legitimate. Ever since 1949, East German propaganda had presented the USSR as the 'big brother' of the newly founded GDR, as its main ally and role model. As the relationship also functioned in Orwellian terms, it created the perception that the GDR authorities were simply not entitled to ban material that had been cleared for publication in the Soviet press. The ban provided yet more evidence that the Politbüro was denying East Germans the opportunity to participate in Gorbachev's reforms. It thus fitted into a pattern that had begun with Hager's dismissal of perestroika in 1987, continued through the tacit withdrawal of three issues of the Soviet newspaper *Neue Zeit* in 1988, and would soon be followed by the withdrawal of five Soviet films from GDR cinemas.

⁴ Peter Pragal and Ulrich Völklein, 'Jedes Land wählt seine Lösung', *Stern*, 9 April 1987, pp. 140–44; repr. as 'Kurt Hager beantwortete Fragen der Illustrierten *Stern*', *Neues Deutschland* (East Berlin), 10 April 1987.

⁵ For a summary of the article see Wolfgang Breuer, "'Unsere Zeit", Düsseldorf: Die DDR und der *Sputnik*', *Neues Deutschland*, 24 November 1988.

⁶ Hauptabteilung XIX, 'Information über die Sicherstellung der UdSSR-Zeitschrift "Sputnik", Nr. 10/88', 3 October 1988, BStU, MfS HA XIX 4774, fol. 2; Hauptabteilung II, 'Information zur Reaktion von DDR-Bürgern zum Nichterscheinen deutschsprachiger Presseerzeugnisse der UdSSR in der DDR', 14 November 1988, BStU, MfS ZAIG 14922, fol. 12.

Yet it was also the high-handed manner in which the ban was announced that caused indignation, even among journalists working for the GDR press agency ADN.⁷ *Neues Deutschland* published the following laconic announcement, which came as news to the Minister for Post and Telegraph Communications Rudolph Schulze, whose Ministry was presented as responsible for the decision:

Mitteilung der Pressestelle des Ministeriums für Post- und Fernmeldewesen

Berlin (ADN). Wie die Pressestelle des Ministeriums für Post- und Fernmeldewesen mitteilt, ist die Zeitschrift 'Sputnik' von der Postzeitungsliste gestrichen worden. Sie bringt keinen Beitrag, der der Festigung der deutsch-sowjetischen Freundschaft dient, statt dessen verzerrende Beiträge zur Geschichte.⁸

A 'reliable' source told the Stasi that ADN journalists agreed unanimously that the measure was '[ein] unkluger, politisch falscher Schritt mit nicht absehbaren Folgen'.⁹ The announcement made no attempt to argue and prove a case; the claim that the magazine made no contribution to German-Soviet friendship was not sustainable. *Neues Deutschland* had failed in its task of furnishing Party functionaries with the arguments needed to justify SED policy. This dereliction of duty was highlighted again on 24 November, when *Neues Deutschland* published an article from the West German Communist Party newspaper *Unsere Zeit* defending the ban.¹⁰ It was not until the following day that *Neues Deutschland* finally published its own justification.¹¹ This mismanagement of the press announcement reinforced the impression that the authorities had been wrong-footed and were reacting to public criticism, first of the decision to ban *Sputnik* and then of their failure to argue their case.

As the text of the ban is usually quoted out of context, it is worth returning to the 19 November edition of *Neues Deutschland* to understand how readers received the announcement. It was placed casually as the fifth item down in the left-hand column of page 2, ironically on the same page as an article three times as long congratulating the Post Minister on his seventieth birthday. The front page was dominated by a photograph of Erich Honecker shaking hands with the Romanian leader Nicolai Ceaușescu, who was just concluding a visit to the GDR. Taken together, the first two pages suggested that the GDR was distancing itself from the USSR and allying itself with the most repressive state in Eastern Europe. Employees at the Ministry for Post and

⁷ Hauptabteilung II, 'Information zur Problematik "Sputnik" und "Freie Welt"', 18 December 1988, BStU, MfS HA ZAIG 14922, fols 1–2.

⁸ 'Mitteilung der Pressestelle des Ministeriums für Post- und Fernmeldewesen', *Neues Deutschland*, 19–20 November 1988.

⁹ Hauptabteilung II, 'Information zur Problematik "Sputnik" und "Freie Welt"', 18 December 1988.

¹⁰ Breuer, *Neues Deutschland*, 24 November 1988.

¹¹ He., 'Gegen die Entstellung der historischen Wahrheit', *Neues Deutschland*, 25 November 1988.

Telegraph Communications—annoyed that the ban had been attributed to them—put up two notices that played ironically with this newspaper coverage. The first notice linked the congratulations to the Minister on his birthday with a message of congratulation to his press office on having prevented ‘die weitere Verzerrung des verbogenen Geschichtsbildes’.¹² The second notice juxtaposed the announcement of the ban with an extract from article 27 of the GDR constitution, guaranteeing freedom of the press, radio, and television.¹³ It thus invited a wider discussion of censorship, indicating how far the ban had backfired.

Challenging Censorship through Music: Reiner Bredemeyer

Like the employees at the Ministry for Post and Telegraph Communications, the composer Reiner Bredemeyer and the poet Kito Lorenc took the coverage in *Neues Deutschland* as the starting-point for their responses to the ban. On 19 November Bredemeyer set the press announcement to music.¹⁴ This instant response was entirely characteristic of Bredemeyer, an SED member who had served as musical director of the Deutsches Theater since 1961. He had a track record of responding quickly to current events with what musicologist Günter Mayer calls ‘musical “feature articles”’, settings of snippets of texts taken from the media.¹⁵ In 1983, for example, Bredemeyer wrote a piece based on an announcement by the news agency TASS that Soviet jets had shot down a Korean passenger aircraft; the title 269 referred to the number of civilians who had been killed.¹⁶ He even wrote an entire symphony, *Eintagssinfonie*, based on one day’s news in *Neues Deutschland*, and he responded to Hager’s dismissal of perestroika by composing *Nebenbei gesagt — Rezitative und Arie nach Antworten von Kurt Hager nebst Adenauer-Credo für Baß und großes Orchester* (1987). Bredemeyer described music as ‘meine Art, mitzureden in diesen Dingen’,¹⁷ suggesting that he was entering into dialogue with the SED, rather in the tradition of Hanns Eisler and his own friend and mentor Paul Dessau. Both of these composers had set newspaper texts to

¹² Hauptabteilung XIX, ‘Information über Reaktionen und Meinungsäußerungen zur Streichung der sowjetischen Zeitschrift “Sputnik” von der Postzeitungsliste’, BStU, MfS HA XIX 4818, fols 26–30 (fols 29–30).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Georg-Friedrich Kühn, ‘Heißer Tip im Flüsterton’, *Frankfurter Rundschau* (Frankfurt a.M.), 23 December 1988; interview with Ute Bredemeyer, 20 March 2012.

¹⁵ Günter Mayer, ‘Advanced Composition and Critical (Political) Ambition’, in *Critical Composition Today*, ed. by Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, *New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century*, 5 (Hofheim: Wolke, 2006), pp. 171–84 (p. 179).

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 179–80; Joachim Lucchesi and Ute Wollny, interview with Reiner Bredemeyer, in *Komponieren zur Zeit: Gespräche mit Komponisten der DDR*, ed. by Mathias Hansen (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1988), pp. 9–39 (p. 26).

¹⁷ Lucchesi and Wollny, p. 27.

music, and Bredemeyer presented Eisler's widow with a handwritten copy of his new piece as a birthday present, marked 'im Sinne H.E.s'.¹⁸ Bredemeyer's piece served to satirize the authorities' decision to ban *Sputnik*, not to call for wholesale political change.

Bredemeyer called his piece 'Post-modern', an allusion to the fact that *Neues Deutschland* had attributed the ban to the Ministry for Post and Telegraph Communications. The piece opens with a blast on a whistle, followed by the sound of porcelain being smashed—a reference to the idiom 'Porzellan zerschlagen', meaning to cause harm or trouble.¹⁹ The sopranos then chant 'Mitteilung der Pressestelle des Ministeriums für Post- und Fernmeldewesen', and elements of the phrase are taken up by the other voices. Their contrapuntal interjections—such as 'Presse Presse', 'Mitteilung der Pressestelle', and 'Meldewesen Meldewesen'—are accompanied by the sound of porcelain again being smashed and, in the score presented to Steffi Eisler, a whip being cracked. After this introduction, the entry of four horns alludes to the post horn that traditionally signalled the arrival of a mail coach and that was depicted on the insignia of the GDR postal service. The horns play the opening lines from Schubert's setting of Wilhelm Müller's poem 'Die Post' (1824), a late addition to the cycle *Die Winterreise*. As the lyrical voice in 'Die Post' laments the fact that the mail coach has not brought a letter from his beloved, it was an apt comment on the fact that subscribers would now wait in vain to receive their copies of *Sputnik*. The four-part choir then sings the text of the *Neues Deutschland* announcement, using variations on the melody of Schubert's setting. Following the text of the ban, a solo tenor sings one line from Müller's poem: 'Willst wohl einmal hinüber sehn und fragen wie es dort mag gehn', a line that in this context can be taken as referring to the Soviet Union, the home of *Sputnik* and perestroika. Meanwhile, the choir hums—a *Gestus* that recalls an instance of censorship in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, where the character Papageno is reduced to humming when his mouth is padlocked shut.²⁰ Once the choir has finished, the horns enter to perform one final ironic quotation, this time from the GDR's national anthem: 'Und der Zukunft zugewandt'.²¹

What makes 'Post-modern' stand out from most of Bredemeyer's other 'musical "feature articles"' is the fact that it was performed in public, in a high-profile location. Bredemeyer told the West German journalist Georg-Friedrich Kühn that he never expected the piece to be performed publicly.²²

¹⁸ Reiner Bredemeyer, '(ADN) POST MODERN', Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste (henceforth AdK), Sammlung Musik 324; interview with Ute Bredemeyer, 20 March 2012.

¹⁹ Reiner Bredemeyer, 'Post-modern', unpublished autograph. I am grateful to Dr Ute Bredemeyer for allowing me access to a copy of the autograph.

²⁰ Interview with Ute Bredemeyer, 20 March 2012.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kühn, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 23 December 1988.

yet on 15 December it was premiered during the Paul-Dessau-Tage, a niche festival of avant-garde music from the GDR. The festival took place at the Theater im Palast, a theatre in the Palast der Republik, the building most closely associated with Honecker's regime. According to Ute Bredemeyer, 'Post – modern' was performed at the start of the programme, conducted by Bredemeyer himself. The performers had a considerable collective standing in the GDR; the choir included the composers Friedrich Schenker, Friedrich Goldmann, and Helmut Zapf; the singer Roswitha Trexler; Ute Bredemeyer (née Wollny); the dramaturge Dieter Rumstig; and the theatre manager Vera Oelschlegel.²³ Oelschlegel was the ex-wife of former Berlin Party chief Konrad Naumann and had once lived with other Politbüro members and their families in the residential enclave Wandlitz, holidaying with Honecker and his wife in the Crimea. Her participation in the choir indicates just how far dissent against the ban had permeated through the ranks of the SED. According to Ute Bredemeyer, the performance elicited a huge round of applause. Two GDR journalists subsequently alluded to the piece in their reviews of the festival, yet—for obvious reasons—they did not mention its link to the *Sputnik* ban.²⁴

The repercussions primarily affected Oelschlegel, as it was her responsibility to secure permission for all performances at the Theater im Palast. In early January 1989 she was ordered twice to explain her actions in writing, and on 8 February she was summoned to attend a disciplinary meeting in the presence of four other officials, including the director of the Palast der Republik, Günter Bischoff, and the Deputy Minister of Culture, Siegfried Böttger. The report of the meeting states:

Genosse Bischoff hob nochmals hervor, daß alles, was im Palast der Republik, im Haus des Volkes, geschieht — positiv wie negativ — anders gewertet wird als in anderen künstlerischen Einrichtungen [. . .].

Umsomehr verwundere ihn, daß die Intendantin, also der staatliche und politische Leiter einer Einrichtung des PdR, nicht nur zuläßt, sondern sogar auf der Bühne mitwirkt, um eine Pressemitteilung vom 19. 11. 1988 im ND mit aufgesetzter Postmütze zu glossieren.²⁵

Both this report and Oelschlegel's autobiography indicate that she perceived that she was in danger of being dismissed, yet officials argued in the meet-

²³ Vera Oelschlegel, *'Wenn das meine Mutter wüßte': Selbstportrait* (Frankfurt a.M.: Ullstein, 1991), p. 28.

²⁴ Gerald Ferber, 'Neue Musik ohne Klangspielereien', *Berliner Zeitung*, 21 December 1988; Eckart Schwinger, 'Ein Laboratorium der neuen Musik', *Neue Zeit* (East Berlin), 28 December 1988.

²⁵ 'Information über die Aussprache des Direktors des PdR, Genossen Bischoff, mit der Intendantin des tip, Genossin Prof. Oelschlegel, am 8. Februar 1989', 9 February 1989, in Bundesarchiv (henceforth BAArch) DY 30/18996.

ing that this perception was inaccurate.²⁶ After the meeting, Bischoff wrote to the head of the Central Committee's Culture Department, Ursula Ragwitz, informing her: 'Wenn auch Genossin Vera Oelschlegel zum Schluß des Gespräches die Kritik akzeptiert, so sind wir doch überzeugt, daß sie ihr Fehlverhalten und die Richtigkeit der Kritik nicht einsieht.'²⁷ He added: 'wir sind auch nicht sicher, daß sich nicht ähnliches, aber anders, wiederholt.'²⁸ Yet Ragwitz omitted to mention Bischoff's concerns in her final report to Hager, which stated simply that Oelschlegel had accepted the authorities' criticisms and would try to abide by them in her future work.²⁹ This report put a more positive spin on the disciplinary proceedings than they appear to have warranted. It suggests that by this time the Culture Department was willing to accept compliance with the ritual of self-criticism, even when it did not seem to be accompanied by a change in underlying attitude.

The lack of public sanctions against Oelschlegel and Bredemeyer implies that the regime was keen to avoid any further negative publicity associated with the ban on *Sputnik*. In any case, as Ute Bredemeyer points out, the authorities could hardly have challenged the composer for quoting word for word from the main SED newspaper.³⁰ On 2 February 1989, just days before the disciplinary meeting with Oelschlegel, *Neues Deutschland* published an article acknowledging Bredemeyer's sixtieth birthday.³¹ The Akademie der Künste held an exhibition in his honour, and he was awarded the Vaterländischer Verdienstorden in bronze.³²

It was typical of Bredemeyer that he—rather than the authorities—would have the last word on the *Sputnik* ban. On 30 October 1989, ten days after the press agency ADN had announced that the Minister for Post and Telegraph Communications—responding to the political demonstrations across the country—had rescinded the ban, Bredemeyer composed a companion piece to 'Post – modern', called 'Post ludium'. The piece featured the text of the new announcement in *Neues Deutschland* and, like its predecessor, was written for choir and four horns. But whereas Bredemeyer had instructed that 'Post – modern' was to be performed 'etwas geschwind', like Schubert's *Winterreise*, 'Post ludium' carries the instruction 'langsam und hinkend'.³³

²⁶ Ibid.; Oelschlegel, 'Wenn das meine Mutter wüßt', p. 250.

²⁷ Letter from Günter Bischoff to Ursula Ragwitz, 9 February 1989, in BArch DY 30/18996.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Letter from Ursula Ragwitz to Kurt Hager, 27 February 1989, in BArch DY 30/18996.

³⁰ Interview with Ute Bredemeyer, 20 March 2012.

³¹ Hansjürgen Schaefer, 'Musikalisches Werk in origineller Tonsprache', *Neues Deutschland*, 2 February 1989.

³² See AdK-O 4608 for documents on the exhibition, which was planned in May and June 1988 and ran from 10 January to 3 February 1989.

³³ Reiner Bredemeyer, 'Post ludium für gem. Chor und 4 Hörner', unpublished autograph. I am grateful to Dr Ute Bredemeyer for allowing me access to a copy of the autograph. Further comments on 'Post ludium' are based on this source.

The tempo thus gives the lie to the opening quotation of a statement by Erich Honecker, 'Den Sozialismus in seinem Lauf hält weder Ochs noch Esel auf', deployed here in an ironic play on the newspaper headline "'Sputnik" wieder im Umlauf'.³⁴ The piece undergoes no fewer than twenty-two changes in time signature in just sixty-two bars, symbolizing the uncertainty and restlessness of the times. It features a minor joke at the expense of the much-maligned Minister for Post and Telegraph Communications: the soprano sings his first name 'Rudolph', and then the bass sings his surname 'Schulze' two octaves lower. 'Post ludium' ends symbolically with the instruction 'neues Zeitmaß' and a quotation from the GDR national anthem, this time the tune associated with the words 'Auferstanden aus Ruinen'.

Challenging Censorship through Poetry: Kito Lorenc

We can detect a certain affinity between Reiner Bredemeyer and Kito Lorenc in their critique of the GDR's media discourse and their ironic play with newspaper quotations. Artistic reactions against the effects of the mass media on language can be traced back at least to the early twentieth century; the Dadaist Hugo Ball, for instance, is said to have presented his sound poems as a means of renouncing 'eine Sprache, die verwüstet und unmöglich geworden ist durch den Journalismus'.³⁵ But such concerns had a particular resonance in the GDR, where the combined forces of the state and SED held a monopoly over the media. Kito Lorenc articulated an especially clear and trenchant critique of the problem in an interview published at the end of his anthology *Wortland* (1983). Here, he described his realization that he was no longer able to write in the same way as he had done in the 1960s: 'Ich merkte, daß ich mich zunehmend rieb an der Sprache der Massenmedien und an vorherrschenden öffentlichen "Sprachregelungen".'³⁶ He drew up a catalogue of what was wrong with the language of the GDR media, identifying the key categories as 'Grandiosität', 'Komplizierung', 'Fundusbildung', and 'übergreifende Wirkungen' and giving examples of each category. For instance, he defines 'Grandiosität' as: 'Repräsentation, Feierlichkeit, Ausführlichkeit bei Amtsaufzählungen, offizielle Stiltfärbung, Pleonasmen, aufgeblähte Formulierung, Dingwortkrankheit u.s.w.'.³⁷ The frequency with which Lorenc's statements have been quoted suggests that his critique is paradigmatic; Jür-

³⁴ This is the headline of the newspaper clipping attached to the autograph. The source of the clipping is not given. *Neues Deutschland* published the announcement on 21–22 February 1989 under the headline "'Sputnik" kommt wieder in den Zeitungsvertrieb'.

³⁵ Quoted in Hans Richter, *Dada — Kunst und Antikunst: Der Beitrag Dadas zur Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne: M. Du Mont Schauberg, 1964), p. 41.

³⁶ Marieluise de Wajjer-Wilke, 'Fünf Fragen an Kito Lorenc', in Kito Lorenc, *Wortland: Gedichte* (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam jun., 1984), pp. 155–66 (p. 165).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

gen Engler describes it as 'eine sprachkritische Meisterleistung, die zugleich eine Gesellschaftskritik *in statu nascendi* war', and Adolf Endler argues 'daß Kito Lorenc' Liste Punkt für Punkt den Krebs trifft, der in unserer Sprache wuchert'.³⁸

The poetic strategies that Lorenc used to parody the official discourse of *Neues Deutschland* were drawn partly from the twentieth-century avant-garde, whose writers were excluded from the canon in the GDR. In *Gedichte gegen den großen Popanz* he acknowledges the influence of the Dadaist poet, sculptor, and painter Hans Arp, citing Arp's description of his use of newspaper excerpts in poetry:

Wörter, Schlagworte, Sätze, die ich aus Tageszeitungen [. . .] wählte, bildeten 1917 die Fundamente meiner Gedichte. Öfters bestimmte ich auch mit geschlossenen Augen Wörter und Sätze in Zeitungen, indem ich sie mit Bleistift anstrich.³⁹

Similar play with media quotations can be found in other GDR poems, most notably Sascha Anderson's cycle 'eNDe', the title of which alludes to *Neues Deutschland*.⁴⁰ But there are other lines of influence in Lorenc's work, such as the concrete poetry of the 1950s and 1960s, which was spearheaded in West Germany by Eugen Gomringer and taken up by some of the Prenzlauer Berg poets in the 1980s.⁴¹ The key feature that sets Lorenc apart from these poets is his engagement with Sorbian culture; he writes in both German and Sorbian. This offers him a particular vantage-point for the estrangement of both languages, and it provides a further point of contact with Arp, who wrote in French, German, and Alsatian.

Lorenc combines his scepticism about public discourse with a belief and confidence in the communicative power of language and its capacity as a tool for enacting and eliciting independent thinking, when used creatively. Poetry, for Lorenc, remains a purposeful exchange: this is the point at which he diverges from some of the artists in the traditions with which he engages. From the 1970s onwards, his poetry became increasingly critical of political developments in the GDR; *Wortland* contains poems that criticize environ-

³⁸ Jürgen Engler, 'Ausflüge in die Wortwelt', *neue deutsche literatur*, 39.9 (September 1991), 149–59; Adolf Endler, 'Wörter, Wörter: Momente neuer Lyrik in der DDR', in Adolf Endler, *Den Tiger reiten: Aufsätze, Polemiken und Notizen zur Lyrik der DDR*, ed. by Manfred Behn (Frankfurt a.M.: Luchterhand, 1990), pp. 13–39 (p. 34).

³⁹ Kito Lorenc, *Gedichte gegen den großen Popanz* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau, 1990), p. 93. Further references to this volume, abbreviated as *GdGP*, are given parenthetically in the main text.

⁴⁰ See Sascha Anderson, *Sechsdreißig Gedichte aus 'Jeder Satellit hat einen Killersatelliten' und vierzehn bisher ungedruckte Gedichte aus der Zeit des Killersatelliten* (Berlin: edition qwert zui opü, 1997), pp. 17, 18, 44, 49, 55, 77. On the treatment of the media in GDR poetry in the 1980s see Karen Leeder, *Breaking Boundaries: A New Generation of Poets in the GDR* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 100–01.

⁴¹ For an example see Frank Weiße's 'überdenken vergangener grundsätze auf die spitze getrieben', quoted and discussed in Leeder, pp. 67–69.

mental problems and censorship.⁴² But the *Sputnik* ban marked an escalation of his critique and a shift in its dissemination, as he circulated fifty copies of a cycle of poems underground. In 2012 Lorenc explained to me how he came to write the cycle:

Der Ruin des DDR-Systems war voraussehbar, die Frösche quakten es sozusagen schon aus jedem Tümpel. Auf das Funktionärs-Kauderwelsch gab es nur noch Hohn und Spott, große Worte machten sich lächerlich, es war alles nicht mehr ganz ernst zu nehmen (wenn überhaupt jemals), auch die Drohgeste des totwunden Apparates nicht. Also gehörte für mich schon kaum Mut zu solcher samizdat-Aktion, vielleicht war es der (Über-)Mut der Verzweiflung. Man tarnte sich auch nur nachlässig, ließ es 'darauf' ankommen.⁴³

Lorenc was unable to find a list of those to whom he had circulated the poems, but he is sure that the recipients included poets and editors, such as Adolf Endler, Elke Erb, Heinz Czechowski, and Hubert Witt.

The title-page of the pamphlet emphasizes the writer's move into illegality and indicates the poems' intended function and audience:

KLEINER WEGGEFÄHRTE DURCH DEN WINTER für 'Vertreter eines gewissen "Pseudoradikalismus", Anhänger verschiedener Musikrichtungen sowie Kriminelle und anderweitig Gestrauchelte' (*Neues Deutschland* vom 6.12.1988 nach *Rudé Právo*). (*GdgP*, p. 37)

The reference to winter functions literally, as *Sputnik* was banned in November, but it also serves as a metaphor for the chill in the political climate. Lorenc's use of the term aligns his cycle with *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen*, Heinrich Heine's reaction against the restoration of the Biedermeier period, which Wolf Biermann used in 1972 as the basis for a rewrite about conditions in the GDR.⁴⁴ It provides a further sign of his intellectual affinity with Reiner Bredemeyer, who had set Wilhelm Müller's *Winterreise* to music.⁴⁵ In the context of renewed political retrenchment, Lorenc's poems are designed to provide companionship, solidarity, and consolation; the dedication positions readers as members of a community of outcasts, accepting the dissident label imposed by the authorities. Lorenc reinforces the illegality of the cycle on

⁴² See e.g. 'Dorfbegräbnis' (1979), *Wortland*, p. 50; 'Blankorevers' (1976), *Wortland*, p. 92; 'Das weiße Kaninchen mit den roten Augen' (1982), *Wortland*, p. 119.

⁴³ Letter from Kito Lorenc to Laura Bradley, 7 May 2012.

⁴⁴ Heinrich Heine, *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1979); Wolf Biermann, *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen* (West Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1972). B. K. Tragelehn responded to Biermann's poem in 'Deutschland im Winter' (1978), in *Lyrik der DDR*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold and Hermann Korte (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2009), pp. 249–50.

⁴⁵ *Die Winterreise* was the subject of the exhibition held at the Akademie der Künste in honour of Bredemeyer's sixtieth birthday. The exhibition featured a cycle of images by the graphic artist Ingo Arnold, inspired by Bredemeyer's setting. See 'Abteilung Ausstellung "Rainer [sic] Bredemeyer" 10.1.1989–03.2.1989', AdK-O 4608.

the title-page by parodying copyright information: 'Darf weder verkauft, noch verliehen, noch sonst irgendwie weitergegeben werden' (*GdgP*, p. 37).

If we follow up the reference to the article in *Rudé Právo*, the newspaper of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, we discover that the 'criminals' and 'deviants' include signatories of Charta 77, to which the playwright Václav Havel belonged. The article alleges that Western secret services are engaging in psychological warfare by bribing young people in Czechoslovakia to produce illegal pamphlets. Its description of the methods used in these pamphlets can be read as a manifesto for Lorenc's own samizdat poems: 'Hervorrufen konkreter Konflikte, Übermittlung von Informationen, Ausarbeitung von Situationsanalysen, Herausgabe diverser Stellungnahmen'; "Abrechnung" mit der Kommunistischen Partei'; and 'eine schrittweise Demontage des Sozialismus'.⁴⁶ Lorenc's cycle provides an inventory of what is wrong with the GDR: the poems are labelled 'kaputt' I–X, in an ironic corruption of the 'caput' divisions of Heine's *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen*. So although the ban on *Sputnik* functions as the starting-point for the cycle, its critique is directed against the Socialist system as a whole. Where Bredemeyer placed the emphasis on entering into a debate, Lorenc seeks instead to create a counter-discourse. It is this that marks the cycle out as an instance of resistance, rather than dissent.

Satire: The Regime's Achilles' Heel

The opening three poems focus on the ban on *Sputnik*, setting the context for the cycle. The first is a pictogram: the typed lines are arranged so that the poem looks like a man wearing a hat, shouting through a megaphone (*GdgP*, p. 38; see Figure 1).⁴⁷ The image suggests an act of public communication, but the figure remains anonymous: we may associate it with a bureaucrat, Stasi officer, or perhaps even an *Ampelmann*, but it could also represent the anonymous masses. Dominated by the word 'spott', it functions literally as a *Spottbild*, a caricature or mockery, and it sets out and enacts Lorenc's aesthetic and political programme.

Most of the man's hat and body are made up of the words 'spott neck', a corruption of the title of *Sputnik* that can be understood as a command to mock and tease. The line forming the brim of the man's hat is longer: 'er kann spott neck leiden'. In this context, the reader understands 'spott neck' to mean 'spott nicht', the opposite of what it seemed to signify before. What the reader cannot tell, though, is who 'er' actually is—a question raised explicitly

⁴⁶ "Rudé Právo": Wir werden die Republik von niemandem antasten lassen', *Neues Deutschland*, 6 December 1988.

⁴⁷ The illustration can be viewed in greater detail in the online version of this article, available at www.jstor.org.

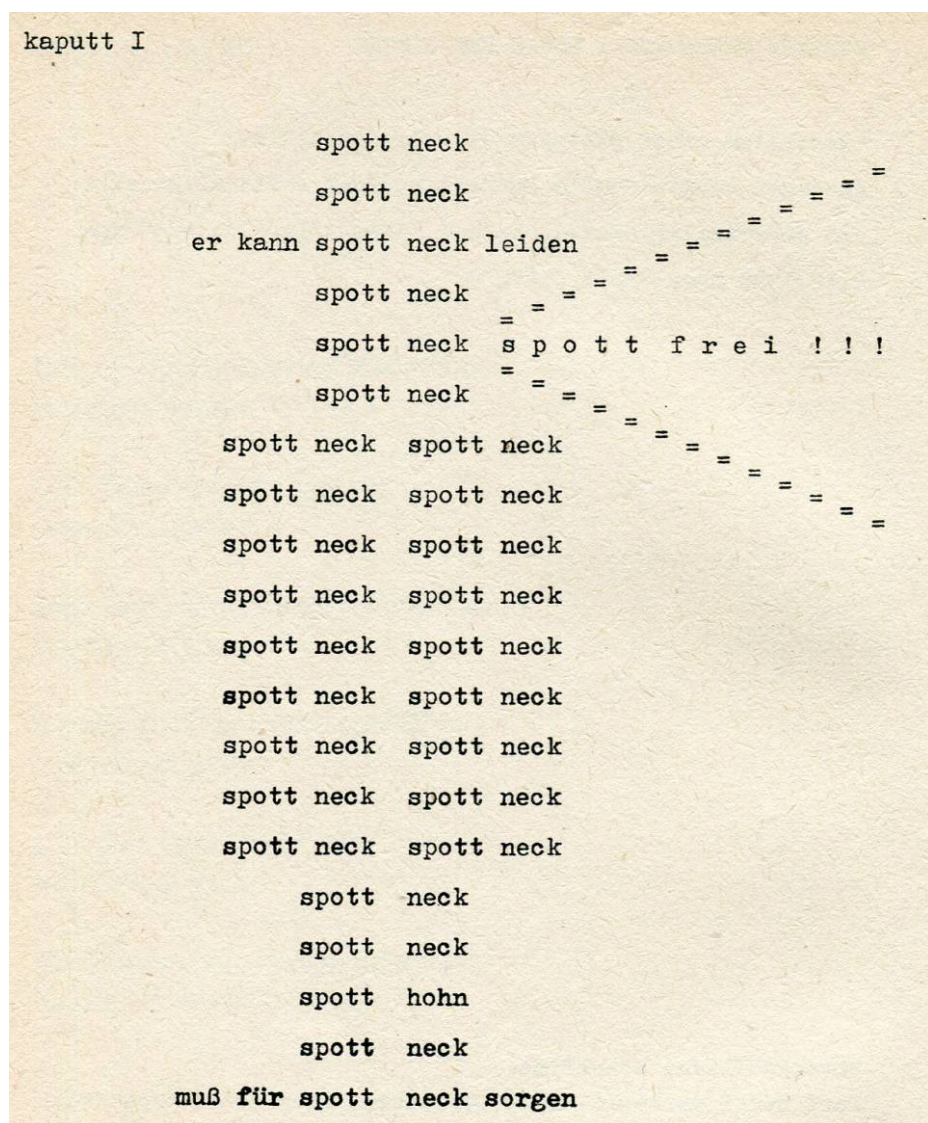


FIG. 1. Kito Lorenc, 'kaputt I' from *Kleiner Weggefährte durch den Winter*
 © Kito Lorenc

towards the end of 'kaputt II' (*GdgP*, p. 39). It could be the man in the poem, or it could be the target of his ridicule, who may be listening to his invective. The words 'spott neck' are repeated as the reader's eye travels down the man's body, and the two possibilities remain in tension: the idea that the reader is being commanded to mock and tease, and the idea that s/he is being ordered *not* to do so. But at the man's knee the phrase changes to 'spott hohn' so that

the subversive meaning is privileged. The reason for varying the pattern at this point becomes clear only in the final poem, 'kaputt X', in which 'weiches knie' marches off into anarchy (*GdgP*, p. 47). This is an allusion to a speech in which Honecker complained of the misgivings of Party members,⁴⁸ a speech that was printed in *Neues Deutschland* on 2 December 1988 and is quoted in two other poems in the cycle. If the man represents an SED member, then scorn is his weak spot—the equivalent of his Achilles' heel.

The final line of the poem reads: 'muss für spott neck sorgen'—meaning either 'must provide mockery and teasing' or 'there's no need to provide mockery', presumably because it is there already. If 'spott neck' is understood as referring to *Sputnik*, then there is a third possibility: that the line means 'must take care of *Sputnik*'. Now that *Sputnik* has been banned, the speaker has to take responsibility for speaking out himself, just as Lorenc has done in this poem and in those that follow.

The man in the poem is using his megaphone to broadcast a message: 'spott frei!!!' This can be read in two ways: as an injunction to mock freely—pointing forward to the poem on the facing page—and as a sign that whatever the man is saying is free from mockery. In the case of the second reading, there is a clear contradiction between the spoken message and the fact that nearly every fibre of the man's body is made up of 'spott neck'.

Critical Reading: Absence and Substitution

The opening poem shows how Lorenc trains his readers in the active, critical reading strategies needed to dissect and subvert media discourse in the GDR, using the fact that the concentrated form of poetry invites close reading. Concrete poetry is perhaps particularly suited to this, as it prevents the reader from simply apprehending the lines sequentially; Max Bense argues that the main principle of construction in concrete poetry is 'das Miteinander [der Wörter] in der Wahrnehmung'.⁴⁹ The need for readers to apply these critical strategies to the authorities' pronouncements is made explicit in 'kaputt III', in which Lorenc—like Bredemeyer—experiments with the press announcement of the ban. But instead of mentioning *Sputnik* directly, Lorenc's poem reports that the Ministry has cancelled the dot on the letter 'i' (*GdgP*, p. 40). It goes on to cite the reasons used to justify the ban on *Sputnik*, adapting the announcement in *Neues Deutschland*: the allegation that it makes no positive contribution and contains only articles that distort history. After the first line,

⁴⁸ Erich Honecker, 'Mit dem Blick auf den XII. Parteitag die Aufgaben der Gegenwart lösen: Aus dem Bericht des Politbüros an die 7. Tagung des Zentralkomitees der SED', *Neues Deutschland*, 2 December 1988.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Hansjörg Schmitthenner, *Konkrete Poesie deutschsprachiger Autoren: Eine Ausstellung des Goethe-Instituts* (Munich: Goethe-Institut, 1969), p. 6.

the dot on the letter 'i' is struck out in the rest of the poem; this crossing out draws attention to its absence, just as the ban on *Sputnik* drew attention to its suppressed content. The poem plays on the phrase 'das Pünktchen auf dem I', which expresses the idea of finishing something to perfection. In this context, though, it signals that this act of censorship represents the last straw. The poem highlights the absurdity of the announcement in *Neues Deutschland*, and it suggests that the source of any distortion is to be found in the authorities' own actions. The poem indicates how Lorenc's use of newspaper quotations differs from that of Arp; the emphasis here is on satirical estrangement for the purpose of understanding, not on an apparently chance combination of elements.

There is more to the poem, however, than the speaker admits, for the letter 's' is missing almost entirely. Instead of 'wie das ministerium', the poem reads: 'wie da miniterium'. What seems like a typographical error—the missing 's'—points to the structural censorship that goes unspoken in the GDR, reminding the reader of the need for constant vigilance. The ban on *Sputnik* is the exception because it was acknowledged, and in this poem it offers the starting-point for a broader discussion of censorship. Once more, we see the difference from Bredemeyer's approach, which targeted only one decision rather than the system.

The need for creative as well as active reading is demonstrated in 'kaputt IV', which presents readers with a broken trajectory that is related specifically to the GDR and its production of consumer goods. New ideas in the GDR have run out, and the supply of consumer goods is about to do the same:

folgestern der neue trabant
gestern der neue wartburg
heute das letzte von folgestern
übelmorgen quak

(*GdgP*, p. 41)

Given that the Wartburg and particularly the Trabant—the two types of car produced in the GDR—were standing jokes with the population, the poem indicates that whatever progress the GDR has made was never impressive.⁵⁰ There is, of course, an additional irony in the fact that 'Trabant' means 'satellite', just like *Sputnik*. But two syllables in the poem are not what the reader expects: the poem makes sense only if 'folgestern' is misread as 'vorgestern' and 'übelmorgen' as 'übermorgen'. If the reader isolates these syllables, the result is 'fol übel', the acoustic equivalent of 'voll übel'. If the reader proceeds

⁵⁰ Economic historian Jonathan Zatlin argues that 'the quantitative and qualitative inadequacies of the SED's economic strategies found their concrete expression in the Trabant and the Wartburg' (Jonathan R. Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 204).

to isolate the syllables that are expected and inferred, then the result is 'vor-über': the GDR is past it.⁵¹

The significance of the final word in 'kaputt IV'—'quak' or 'croak'—only becomes clear from the next poem. The left-hand column in 'kaputt V' sets out the calls of toads and frogs, while the right-hand column indicates the species (*GdgP*, p. 42). Towards the end the reader finds 'gequake' and 'wildge-wordener spießer'. These are words that Honecker used in his speech to the Central Committee at the start of December 1988, in which he dismissed reappraisals of the history of the Stalinist period as 'das Gequake wildge-wordener Spießer, die die Geschichte der KPdSU und der Sowjetunion im bürgerlichen Sinne umschreiben möchten'.⁵² In the light of 'kaputt V', the 'quak' at the end of the previous poem can be identified as the sound of protest—a protest that occurs in reaction to stagnation in the GDR, and also to the misrepresentation of history as continual progress.

Creative Resistance: Estrangement and Appropriation

We are starting to see a pattern in the way in which Lorenc creatively reworks texts from *Neues Deutschland*, from the dedication on the title-page, through the announcement of the ban, to Honecker's speech, which supplies further material for 'kaputt VI' (*GdgP*, p. 43). But here, and in the two poems that follow, the voice of the authorities dominates the entirety of each poem. The poems are not designed to convince the reader of the authenticity of their portrayal of the authorities, but rather to expose and critique them. Lorenc achieves this through the use of clipped, hacked language, as the poems' first lines indicate: 'bei uns nix personen kult', 'nix vergleichen stalin mit hitler', 'du hüben nix kritik üben' (*GdgP*, pp. 43–45). Verbs appear only in the infinitive, as primitive commands, and 'nix' stands in for 'kein' or 'keine'. Ewout van der Knaap notes that this language is reminiscent of Ernst Jandl's *Ausländerdeutsch*; a further point of comparison would be with the clipped language that Bertolt Brecht uses in *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* to depict the alienation of the rulers from the people, and which judge Azdak imitates as a means of exposing the political interests of the ruling classes.⁵³ When deployed in

⁵¹ The substitution of syllables or letters is a technique that occurs in other experimental GDR poetry, perhaps most memorably in Stefan Döring's poem 'wortfege', a title that invites the reader to reconfigure the letters to produce 'fortwege'. See Alexander von Bormann, 'Rede-Wendungen: Zur Rhetorik des gegenwärtigen Gedichts in der DDR', in *DDR-Lyrik im Kontext*, ed. by Gerd Labrousse, Christine Cosentino, and Wolfgang Ertl, Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik, 26 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), pp. 89–143 (p. 119).

⁵² Honecker, *Neues Deutschland*, 2 December 1988.

⁵³ Ewout van der Knaap, 'Kito Lorenc und das Paradox des heimatgebundenen Avantgardisten', in *Retrospect and Review: Aspects of the Literature of the GDR 1976–1990*, ed. by Robert Atkins and Martin Kane, German Monitor, 40 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 226–37 (p. 230); see also

the context of Lorenc's cycle, the language points to the Stalinist behavioural patterns inherited from the GDR's Soviet occupying forces.

'kaputt VI' estranges and interrogates a claim that Honecker made in his speech to the Central Committee: 'Sie [die SED] hat nie zugelassen, daß bei uns Personenkult und Massenrepressalien auftreten konnten.'⁵⁴ This claim was intended to rebut allegations made in the banned October issue of *Sputnik*. The poem suggests that repression in the GDR targets and isolates the individual, preventing the formation of group solidarity. This atomization is reflected in the language: compound nouns are presented in their constituent parts, and words break down into syllables in the closing line: 'immer nur ein per son ein zel' (*GdgP*, p. 43). The final syllable is suggestive of 'Zelle', alluding to solitary confinement in prison. The counterpoint to this process of atomization is the companionship and solidarity promised in the title of the cycle. This solidarity is achieved through the act of reading, as the reader decodes Lorenc's puzzles and creatively produces meaning from the texts.

In the final poem of the cycle, the destruction or disintegration of socialism accelerates: the poem presents a march into anarchy with a ramshackle collective, and it describes an end to complicity with dictatorship. It opens:

treibender keil
und weiches knie
marschieren in
die anarchie
(*GdgP*, p. 47)

This stanza describes an alliance based on contradictions: the hard image of 'treibender keil' contrasts with the vulnerability of 'weiches knie', and the military image of marching—suggesting organization, direction, and co-ordination—is at odds with the idea of anarchy. This anarchy is itself reflected in the mixed metaphors of the fourth stanza: 'schwimmen marschieren | durchs gesetzlose meer'. The poem describes how people cast overboard 'das vornehme schweigen' and 'das kumplige wort', the forms of negative sociability that perpetuate the regime.

It is possible to read 'kaputt X' as a celebration of anarchic revolt against dictatorship. It has an energy and sense of direction that the other poems lack, conveyed through the regular rhyme scheme and rhythm. The alliteration and dactyls—'bloße Begier', 'brechen das Bild'—accelerate the pace, creating an

Ewout van der Knaap, 'Die Produktivität der Sprachgrenze: Zur deutschsprachigen Lyrik von Kito Lorenc in den siebziger und achtziger Jahren', in *Perspektiven sorbischer Literatur*, ed. by Walter Koschmal, Schriften des Komitees der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zur Förderung der slawischen Studien, 19 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1993), pp. 247–63 (p. 255); Bertolt Brecht, *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe* (henceforth *BFA*), ed. by Werner Hecht and others, 30 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp; Berlin: Aufbau, 1988–2000), VIII (1992), 67–69.

⁵⁴ Honecker, *Neues Deutschland*, 2 December 1988.

impression of urgency (*GdgP*, p. 47). But if we return to Honecker's speech to the Central Committee, an alternative reading becomes possible. The images and metaphors in the poem are drawn almost exclusively from Honecker's address, in which he refers primarily to processes within the SED. According to Honecker, people in the West want the SED to deviate from its programme 'und stattdessen in die Anarchie zu marschieren'. He refers to the problems that arise 'wenn einer [in der Partei] knieweich wird', and to 'alle, die sich der Illusion hingeben, zwischen die KPdSU und die SED einen Keil treiben zu können'.⁵⁵ Critics of the *Sputnik* ban argued that SED hardliners were themselves driving a wedge between the GDR and the USSR. In the light of Honecker's speech, the poem can be reinterpreted as a description of the SED, split between hardliners and those with serious doubts about the Party line, heading off together into anarchy. Lorenc's repurposing of metaphors from Honecker's speech provides one of the clearest enactments of his poetics, which he describes—echoing both Nietzsche and Brecht—in the following terms: 'Wie man ein "stehendes Heer" von Wendungen, mit seinen Regeln entwaffnend regellos verfahren, nach allen Regeln der Kunst aus der Fassung bringt.'⁵⁶

Lorenc received reactions to his poems only from those readers who guessed that he was the author, and their reactions were positive. He did not learn of any reactions from either the Stasi or SED functionaries, even though he was under Stasi surveillance from 1971 until 1989. Lorenc surmises that his samizdat activity may have remained hidden from the authorities, or else that they may not have been able to decode enough of the poems.⁵⁷ When I approached the Bundesarchiv, Stasi Archive, and the State Archive in Dresden, archivists were not able to locate any documents referring to the poems. As so much material in official files was destroyed in 1989–90, the absence of catalogued material does not prove definitively that the authorities did not know of the poems or link them to Lorenc. Such material may yet emerge as research on the files continues. What we do know, however, is that in early

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ De Waijer-Wilke, p. 166. Here Lorenc quotes the reference to the abolition of a standing army in Brecht's *Die Tage der Kommune*: 'In Erwägung, daß alle Bürger ohne Unterschied sich zur Verteidigung des nationalen Territoriums bereithalten, wird das stehende Heer abgeschafft' (BFA, VIII, 283). However, in the context of Lorenc's discussion of language, the reference to a standing army also recalls Nietzsche's description of truth as 'ein bewegliches Heer von Metaphern, Metonymien, Anthropomorphismen, [. . .] Illusionen, von denen man vergessen hat, dass sie welche sind, Metaphern, die abgenutzt und sinnlich kraftlos geworden sind' (Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinn', in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, c. 40 vols (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1967–), III.II: *Nachgelassene Schriften 1870–1873* (1973), 367–84 (pp. 374–75)).

⁵⁷ Letter from Lorenc to Bradley, 7 May 2012. Lorenc was initially under suspicion of 'staatsfeindliche Hetze und Gruppenbildung', and he was subsequently made the subject of the operational investigation codenamed OPV 'Poet'. He told me that his Stasi files included thousands of pages of reports from approximately thirty German and Sorbian informants, along with transcripts of interrogations and records of house searches.

autumn 1989, as political protests in the GDR mounted, Lorenc decided to forgo his anonymity by including the cycle in the manuscript for his new collection of poems. He completed the manuscript by 15 September 1989; by the time the poems came to be published in 1990, the political system that they campaigned against had already collapsed.⁵⁸

Towards a Culture of Creative Protest

These new works of art were designed primarily for circulation within insider communities, allowing their recipients and readers to experience a sense of solidarity and to derive some satisfaction from satirical attacks directed against the ban. The public premiere of 'Post – modern' came as a complete surprise to Bredemeyer, and it was planned only after the piece had been written. Yet evidence from other cultural institutions in East Berlin and Dresden suggests that the performance was part of a wider pattern, and that the ban on *Sputnik* marked a moment when individuals in the public eye began to use the platforms available to them to express dissent. At the Semperoper in Dresden, Jürgen Hartfiel (playing Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*) departed from the libretto by saying that he would shave the Count Almaviva. Hartfiel explained that he had time to do so now, as he had previously always been a reader of *Sputnik*.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, members of the Staatsschauspiel Dresden incorporated allusions to the ban into a production of Volker Braun's play *Die Übergangsgesellschaft*. At the start of the performance, copies of *Sputnik* were lying on the stage. A lorry driver—played by Lars Jung—entered and picked them up, reportedly eliciting 'stürmischen Applaus' from the audience. On 27 November Jung added the comment that these copies were all that had survived censorship.⁶⁰ The manager of the Deutsches Theater in East Berlin, Dieter Mann, reportedly considered it necessary to forbid his actors from adding improvised allusions to the ban in their performance of *Diktatur des Gewissens*, written by the Soviet playwright Mikhail Schatrow.⁶¹ At the Maxim Gorki Theater, meanwhile, the manager Albert Hetterle told the Party authorities that he had managed to stave off a general protest for the time being, but did not know how much longer that would be possible.⁶² These reports indicate just how febrile the situation was in key cultural institutions, and

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ 'Hinweise zu einigen bedeutsamen Aspekten der Reaktion der Bevölkerung im Zusammenhang mit der Mitteilung über die Streichung der Zeitschrift "SPUTNIK" von der Postzeitungsvertriebsliste der DDR', 30 November 1988, BStU, MfS ZAIG 4244, fols 2–7 (fol. 6).

⁶⁰ 'Information zur Aufführung der "Übergangsgesellschaft" von Volker Braun am 27.11.1988 im Kleinen Haus des Staatsschauspiels Dresden', 28 November 1988, Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, SächsStA-D 11857 A 13937.

⁶¹ 'Information', 28 November 1988, Landesarchiv Berlin C Rep 902 6811.

⁶² 'Information', 22 November 1988, Landesarchiv Berlin C Rep 902 6811.

that those in charge—on whom the Party relied to enforce its policy—were themselves unsympathetic to the ban.

It was not only in theatres and opera houses that individuals were starting to express dissent in public. At the GDR's youth radio station DT64, the presenter Silke Hasselmann used her slot on 19 November to express her disagreement with the ban, opening her broadcast with the sentence: 'Ein Sputnik ist heute abgestürzt.'⁶³ She went on to play a song by the British New Wave band Sigue Sigue Sputnik, and she had a song by the East Berlin group Pankow waiting to play, ready at the line 'Aufruhr in den Augen'. She informed her listeners: 'Am Mikrofon Silke Hasselmann mit'—and then the song started: 'Aufruhr in den Augen'.⁶⁴ When no one rang in to object, Hasselmann grew bolder still, telling listeners: 'Leider haben wir jetzt eine Zeitschrift weniger, um uns zu informieren, aber das ist nur gerecht. Gab es doch schon die letzte Ausgabe nicht. Diese Auslieferungsunregelmäßigkeiten können wir Leser uns nicht leisten.'⁶⁵ There is even one example of a co-ordinated illegal protest: on 28 November citizens' rights campaigners in Leipzig staged a demonstration against the ban on *Sputnik* and on five Soviet films. They let off white balloons in front of a cinema, the Filmtheater Capitol. Some of the balloons had 'Schluss mit dem Sputnikverbot' written on them, while others bore the titles of the banned films.⁶⁶ What these diverse public expressions of dissent share is the element of performance: they were designed to attract an audience and to ensure that the protest would live on through word of mouth, once the activity itself had ended. The overall number of such activities may have been small, but they had an incremental significance in publicizing dissent and in encouraging its expression.

Conclusion

The ban on *Sputnik* generated widespread dissent across the GDR, owing to the perception that the regime had infringed the terms of the contract that it had established since 1949: a contract that was based on anti-Fascism and loyalty to the USSR. Dissent was particularly acute because this chill in the political climate came at a time when other Eastern bloc states were engaging

⁶³ Harald Müller, 'Zwischen Sputnik und Tiananmen', in *DT64: Das Buch zum Jugendradio 1964–1993*, ed. by Andreas Ulrich and Jörg Wagner (Leipzig: Thom, 1993), pp. 98–105 (p. 99); quoted in Gunter Holzweißig, *Die schärfste Waffe der Partei: Eine Mediengeschichte der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2002), p. 154.

⁶⁴ Jürgen Balitzki and Marcus Heumann, "'Ein Sputnik ist heute abgestürzt": Vorwendezeit bei Jugendradio DT 64', transcript of co-production by RBB and Deutschlandfunk, broadcast on 8 September 2009 <<http://www.dradio.de/download/109889/>> [accessed 19 April 2012], p. 5.

⁶⁵ Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Endspiel: Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (Munich: Beck, 2009), p. 76.

⁶⁶ Mathias Orbeck, 'Bürgerrechtler lassen Sputniks fliegen', *LVZ online*, <http://lichtfest.lvz-online.de/lvzs.site.postext.revolutionsgeschichten.artikel_id,11482.html> [accessed 29 June 2011].

with the reform process that Gorbachev had sanctioned. The SED leadership began to lose control over its own members within the apparatus of power, as individuals within the Stasi protested against the decision and SED members lodged petitions with the authorities. The ban also sparked heated discussions in workplaces and ironic expressions of dissent in the public space, advertising the presence of dissent and lowering resistance to its expression in future. These public expressions of dissent were directed horizontally—towards other potential protesters—rather than vertically (and confidentially) to the authorities.

Erich Honecker and Joachim Herrmann, the Head of the Central Committee's Department for Agitation and Propaganda, mishandled the announcement of the ban, and Bredemeyer and Lorenc—like workers at the Ministry for Post and Telegraph Communications—subjected the text of the announcement to critical scrutiny in their responses. Initially, Lorenc achieved his manipulation of the discourse of *Neues Deutschland* through the conventional modes of irony and estrangement, just as Bredemeyer had done in 'Post-modern'. His poems demand intellectual activity on the part of the reader, whose task is partly to decode the word games, just as Bredemeyer's listener has to decode the references to Schubert, Müller, and the GDR national anthem. Yet Lorenc went further than Bredemeyer by stimulating the reader to create meaning, as the allusive language of some of his poems resists single explanations. His creative play with official discourse took on a new quality in the final poem of the cycle, where he performed an act of literary cannibalism, digesting and reworking the metaphors of Honecker's speech to the point at which the original and its censorial function were destroyed. According to anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday, cannibalism functions as 'the ultimate act of domination' and as a means of 'assimilat[ing] the animus of another group's hostile power into one's own'.⁶⁷ In this sense, Lorenc's poem was an act of resistance and regeneration, and it marked a symbolic victory over censorship. There was no point in censoring *Sputnik* if even a speech by Honecker could serve as the raw material for sedition.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

LAURA BRADLEY

⁶⁷ Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 6.